

Gordon, H.

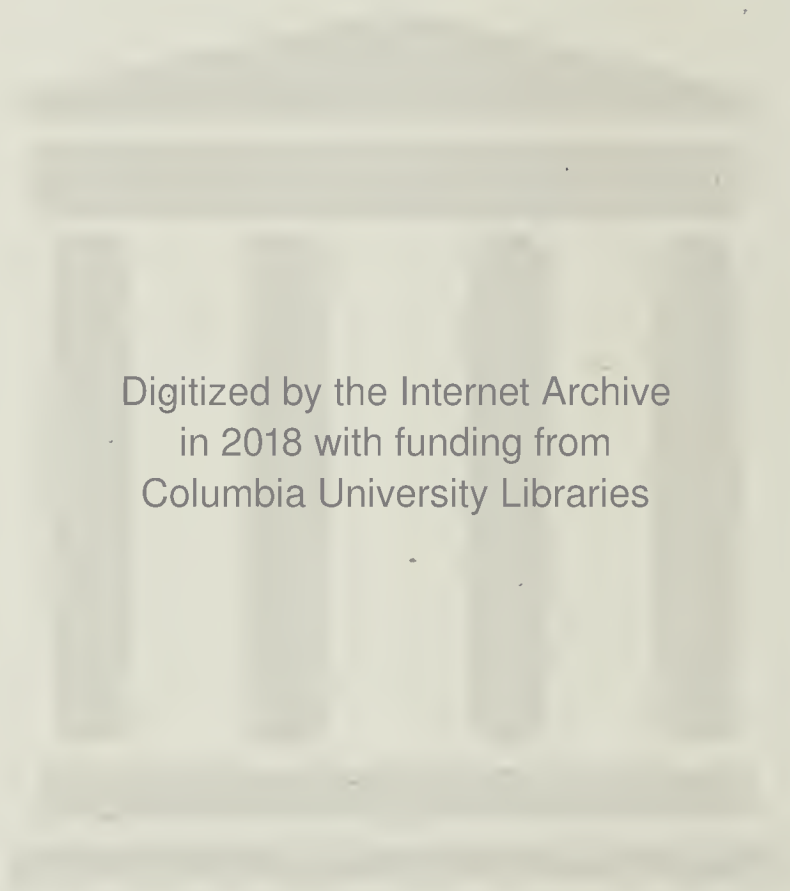
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HENRY GORDON, OF CARTWRIGHT

BY WILLIAM J. BARNES.



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MR. GORDON IN
WINTER DRESS

AMONG life's great throng of impressions there are always a few that stand out clearly among the mass. In my own life these are not so much the impressions of things I have perceived, or have done, or have had done to me, as they are impressions of a few persons whose lives I have felt. They are not merely matters of memory, therefore; they are part of my life. I cannot forget them.

One of the lives whose mark has sunk most deeply into my own is that of Henry Gordon, of Cartwright, Labrador. I take my hat off to him as a full-sized, heroic man. My summer on the Labrador a year ago brought inestimable treasure into my life, but I think the richest gift was a brief but intimate acquaintance with this man, and as I go back for another visit there is nothing I anticipate with greater pleasure than the hope of seeing Mr. Gordon again.

I do not know much about who he was before he came to Labrador, nor where he was born, nor who his parents are. I am most interested in the Henry Gordon I know now. But one cannot be with him long without knowing that he is an Englishman, and I think he is an Oxford graduate. He came to Labrador two years ago as a minister of the Church of England, and he has been there through two Labrador winters. His headquarters are at Cartwright, down in Sandwich Bay, and he does the work of his church among the people along about one hundred and fifty miles of coast. Spotted Islands is luckily within the southern part of his territory. He is not a worker of the Grenfell Mission, but he is working among the same people for the same cause, and is beloved by the Grenfell workers with whom he associates as he is by the people whose way he lights.

He is a genuine philanthropist. He loves his fellowmen with his whole life, he is throwing his life without reserve into a great love-gift to people, and he does it in such a way that people love him for it. He is one of those rare individuals who can get their love across to the world. He is genuine and people know it.

I met him first on the little steamer that took us down the Labrador from St. John's, Newfoundland. He was so whole-heartedly cheerful and alert that I was captured from

the start. We passed a Sunday on the boat, and in the evening the steward came around to call us all down to the dining saloon for divine service. When all the passengers and as many of the crew as could come had gathered, Mr. Gordon stood up and said, in so frank and manly a way that we all agreed with him, that it would seem so indecent to go through Sunday without a church service of some kind that he had taken it upon himself to conduct one. Then he led us through as beautiful a service as sailors or landlubbers anywhere experienced that day, I am sure. He had something that he knew the people on the ship needed, and he gave it to us like a man who is a true son of God. It is doubtless that unfaltering conviction that has sent him into as difficult a field as a man can find, and that has kept him there through experiences and circumstances that would crush many a man.

He has such a fine sense of divine companionship that he is absolutely fearless. When pressed to it he will tell of experiences of utmost danger and hardship, but always with that invincible, cheerful, faithful confidence which I had the privilege of seeing him carry clear through one encounter with death. He was acting as pilot for a group of five of us in our little open motor-boat, the "P. & S." We were caught out in a terrific storm in pitch-black night. It was a nerve-racking and exhausting experience, and the rest of us would scarcely have had the en-

duration for it if we had not had his unflinching courage and confidence to brace us up. We were rather constantly aware of the immediate proximity of the great arch-enemy. Numerous thoughts as to the significance of that fact did creep into our consciousness, and it was hard to understand Mr. Gordon's calmness. When the smiles on our faces had given place to stern seriousness and then to hopeless, set grins, his smile was true, and he talked about getting to harbor as if he really expected it could be done. Only once did his face become stern. The engine was going bad and everybody knew that when the engine stopped it would be time for us to get off the planet. It was his terribly effective "Will you please get the engine in order" that thawed two of us from the floor and made us do things with our stiff hands that we thought were impossible and that took us all into the harbor.

Afterward I asked him how he felt during the experience. He said he had realized our danger, but that the thought of death had scarcely entered his mind. He was prepared for it when it should come but in the meantime, with perfect equanimity, he could devote unimpaired energy to the performance of his duty and to combatting opposing circumstances. He is not reckless. He knows what danger is. But he does not know what fear is in himself. He knows that no danger can touch his own real self.

For those of us who have seen the Labrador in the summertime, and have sometimes thought that it might be a lonely place even then, it is not hard to imagine a high grade of desolateness for its winter season. Of course it is home for the Labrador people, and as dear to them as any home country is to any people, in spite of its danger and hardship and sorrow. But I see a hero in every stranger who spends a winter there in self-sacrificing service. Of course Mr. Gordon is by no means alone in this heroism, but this article cannot be a catalogue of heroes. Let us hope that some day there may be a collection of Labrador biographies to preserve to the world some of its finest examples of genuine sturdy manhood and womanhood.

In contrast to the summer, as "four months of feast," Mr. Gordon calls the Labrador winter "eight months of starve," and in that he is speaking of the conditions of life of the people for whom he is working. It is to carry a bit of joy to them that he tramps through long miles of snow, or over ice that breaks beneath him, or drives his half-wild dogs, or sails through the perilous ice-fields, or rocks, or storms. He is a messenger of love to a desolate people, and he carries his message joyfully along the desolate and perilous road that leads to their door.

Henry Gordon is a quiet man, living his life in a quiet land. He does his deeds of heroism every day and the world hears noth-

ing of them. There is no applause; no trumpets. It seems unbecoming to print this little sketch of him, but its inadequacy will make it more permissible. If it helps someone to feel that he has had a glimpse of another true prince of the House of God it will have been worth while, for it is the impress of such lives as his upon our own that makes ours true coins of the Realm.